

The month of July is African American Marrow Donor Awareness Month. Bone marrow transplants are the only viable way to treat many types of cancer. Effective marrow transplants require that patients find a donor who has a similar genetic makeup to theirs. African Americans face a challenging set of circumstances when attempting to locate marrow donors. African American patients tend to have a more atypical genetic makeup, making finding a match less likely. Additionally, fewer African Americans sign up to become donors.

In 2005, I voted in favor of the Stem Cell Therapeutics and Research Act, which provided federal funding for the expansion of the national bone marrow donor registry, *Be the Match Registry*. The majority of patients in need of bone marrow transplants depend on this registry to find a match. In 2008, only 15 percent of African Americans who used the registry to find a donor were successful. Conversely, 40 percent of Caucasians successfully found a marrow match through the national registry.

I was made acutely aware of this problem when I discovered that a young man in my home state of Florida died of leukemia when he was unable to find a match for the bone marrow transplant he was in need of. I want to encourage everyone, especially African Americans, to consider becoming a bone marrow donor. The procedure to donate bone marrow is a relatively painless minor surgery that will save a life.

For more information about the Be the Match Registry or to add your name, visit <http://www.marrows.org/>